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Lee, Henry Washington

The true elements of civil prosperity

Davenport

1857

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THE TRUE ELEMENTS OF CIVIL PROSPERITY.

A

SERMON

DELIVERED IN

ST. LUKE'S CHURCH, DAVENPORT, IOWA,

ON

THANKSGIVING DAY,

NOVEMBER 26, 1857,

308
Z
Box 824

BY

THE RT. REV. HENRY W. LEE, D. D.,
BISHOP OF THE DIOCESE OF IOWA.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

DAVENPORT:
PUBLISHING HOUSE OF LUSE, LANE & CO.
1857.

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The Rector of St. Luke's Church and others who listened to the following Discourse have expressed the conviction that its publication would be beneficial to the community, and to the Protestant Episcopal Church in this Diocese.—The writer therefore submits it to the press; simply remarking, that it was penned in unusual haste, and that it is now given to the public with a deep sense of its many defects and imperfections. Such as it is, it is respectfully inscribed to the people of the city of Davenport and of the State of Iowa.

O most mighty God, King of kings, and Lord of lords! without whose care the watchman waketh but in vain, while we yield Thee unfeigned thanks and praise for all Thy past and present mercies, we implore, in this our time of need, Thy succor and blessing in behalf of our rulers and magistrates, and all the people of this land. Remember not our many and great transgressions; turn from us the judgments which we feel and fear; and give us wisdom to do, and patience to endure whatsoever shall be well pleasing in Thy sight; that so Thy chastenings may yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and that at the last we may rejoice in Thy salvation, through JESUS CHRIST our Lord. *Amen.*

SERMON.

PROVERBS XI: 11. "By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted; but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked."

It is the remark of a sensible writer, that "the prosperity of a city or town depends more upon the character of the people, than upon the local situation of the place. The city of Sodom," he continues, "was situated in a very fertile valley, on the banks of a large river, and not far from a good market; but the character of the people was such that it caused its entire destruction. The natural advantages of the town fostered the indolence of the people, and inclined them to a vicious self-indulgence. The city of Tyre was built upon a rocky island, near the eastern extremity of the Mediterranean; its natural advantages were not very great; but its first inhabitants, who were enterprising fishermen and merchants, by their unremitting industry and frugality became opulent, and their city held

a high rank through all the East. As wealth increased, wickedness abounded, and she "whose merchants were princes" fell a prey to the rapacity of war. Jerusalem and Athens were made what they once were, by the habits of the people, more than by any peculiar advantages of soil, climate, or local position."

It is well known that New England owes its general prosperity to the character and habits of its first settlers, rather than to the fertility of its soil, or the salubriousness of its climate. And the same may be said of our country generally. Though it includes almost every variety of sterility and fertility as to its soil, and extends from the snowy North to the sunny South, thus having great diversity of climate; yet is its ordinary prosperity to be attributed to the intelligence and virtue of the people. It is found that those portions of our country are the most flourishing where education and religion are the most widely diffused, and where the local institutions are most in accordance with the spirit of freedom and Christianity.

The wise man lets us into the secret of true civil and social prosperity when he says that "by the blessing of the upright the city is exalted," and also that "righteousness exalteth a nation." Nothing can be more true than that in a country like ours, knowledge and virtue are the main pillars that support the government, and give stability to the whole frame-work of society. If either of these pillars were removed, our temple of liberty would become at once a mass of ruins, burying beneath them our happiness and our prosperity. Republican institutions are peculiarly dependent upon popular education, popular morality,

and popular piety. So that whatever promotes such education, morality, and piety, actually promotes the true welfare of the country; and whatever depresses and discourages them, is a serious injury to the country, having a direct tendency to undermine the very foundations of the government, and to dry up the fountains of social prosperity.

The continued prosperity of these United States must depend chiefly upon the moral virtue of the people; and moral virtue cannot exist without religion. Christianity, therefore, must be regarded as the great bulwark of our safety; and Christianity too in its simplest and purest form. The general prevalence of a corrupt Christianity has been proved to be unfavorable to popular education, to civil liberty, and to national prosperity. Even such a Christianity will elevate a people far above the condition of barbarism; but it cannot consist with the rich blessings of freedom and independence. Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Ireland can never be what America, England, Scotland and Germany now are, as to their civil and social condition, until Romanism becomes essentially modified, or else superseded by the principles of Protestantism. A pure Christianity is necessary to a pure literature, to a healthful popular education, and to rational freedom. The religion of the Bible must take the place of traditionary superstitions, before the nations that now constitute nominal Christendom can all rejoice together in the privileges and blessings which we enjoy in this our own, our native land.

But these very privileges and blessings which are now our happy portion can be retained only by the general prevalence in our country of a pure Christianity. The religion

of the Bible must pervade the masses of the people, if we would maintain our present elevation among the nations of the earth. In the language of one of our most distinguished divines, "I view the coming generation of Americans as certain to occupy the most important and responsible position ever held by the sons of Adam; as having an influence to exercise, and a work to accomplish,

'Such as earth
Saw never: such as heaven stoops down to see.' "

But this influence will not be rightly exercised, nor this work be beneficially accomplished, unless we become as distinguished for our national piety as we are for our civil and religious advantages.

But it is not my design to dwell upon these points, important and momentous as they are. I selected the text for a purpose to which the preceding remarks are not at all irrelevant, but which is yet one of more immediate interest to us as members of this particular community.

The voice of inspiration declares that "by the blessing of the upright the city is exalted; but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked." It is my design, therefore, to make use of this fitting occasion to present to your consideration some remarks upon *the moral and religious character and prospects of our own city*, with additional observations respecting *the new and growing State of which we are citizens.*

It may be said of the city in which our lot is cast that it has important natural advantages; that it is one of the centres of a fertile and fruitful region, producing "the finest of the wheat;" and that it is one of the great thoroughfares of this portion of the country. But we may rest assured that the real prosperity of the city depends more upon the character of the inhabitants, than upon any of its local advantages. Its rail-roads and steamboats, its majestic river and noble bridge, its rich adjacent prairies, its mills and manufactories, its merchants and mechanics, its banks and capital, its enterprise and industry, are all important elements of comfort and prosperity; but these cannot give us that exaltation which is referred to in the text. That can come only from "the blessing of the upright," or from the blessing of God on the upright. If as a people we are upright; if we do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God; if we depart not from the ancient landmarks which our fathers have set; then shall we be as a city on a hill, which cannot be hid, and other communities will be constrained to confess that we are that happy people whose God is the Lord. But, on the other hand, if our character be the opposite of that just described; if we become forgetful of God, and of our obligations to honor and serve Him; if we fail to discountenance vice and immorality, or neglect to maintain a high standard of public virtue; we shall surely experience the retributive displeasure of the Most High. By the mouth of the wicked the city will be overthrown. This part of the text is a figurative expression, meaning that the city is overthrown by the words and actions of the wicked, or by their character and conduct. The whole tendency of wickedness in a community is to destroy all true prosperity; to introduce social discord and confusion; to make man

distrust his fellow-man; to render the people discontented with the useful avocations of life; and thus to derange all social and commercial affairs in such a degree as to warrant the strong expression that the city is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

The true prosperity, therefore, of this and of every city is inseparably connected with public virtue. We may go further, and assert that no city can be truly prosperous without maintaining a high standard of piety among the various classes and orders of its inhabitants. Where religion is most flourishing, there you find the most flourishing communities; and where the incrtests of religion are depressed, there is a lack of the chief element of social happiness and even of commercial prosperity.

Convinced of the truth of these remarks, I feel it to be my duty, as a public teacher of religion, to exert all the influence which official station may give me for the elevation of our character as a community. As a city like ours increases in population and wealth, the influence of the pulpit becomes more and more important, for the preservation of the public morals, and for the increase of true religion. I am not departing, therefore, from the legitimate province of a minister of the Gospel, or of a Bishop in the Church, when I call your attention to the subject of the present discourse.

Our city is as yet in its infancy; and its character remains to be fully formed. How important that a high-toned morality, and a healthful state of religion and piety, should become its distinguishing characteristics! What we most need is a powerful religious influence. The elements of society require to be shaped by Christian principle. A

most solemn responsibility rests upon the present generation of our citizens in regard to the character which the city is to bear in days and years to come. That character is of greater moment to us than street-improvements, stately public buildings, or the most judicious municipal administrations. These things are all important elements of prosperity; but they sink into insignificance when compared with moral and religious character. But what, is our character, in a moral and religious point of view? Is the existing generation of citizens one that will give a right tone to society, and set up landmarks which will never need to be removed? I would not judge uncharitably of this or of any community; but it is my deep conviction that the tone of piety and morals in our city is far too low. My conviction is the same in regard to the West in general. I speak freely on this point, because I am myself a citizen of the West, and a resident among yourselves. With the West, and with the State of Iowa in particular, I am fully identified. Considerations of expediency and convenience have placed me in this city, so beautiful for situation, and here is my home. I have a right, therefore, to speak plainly; and I earnestly declare to you that our general tone of morality and piety needs to be very much elevated. Our people are too sordid, too much given up to mere delving for money, too little inclined to literary pursuits, too much engrossed by business, too regardless of the world to come. Our social entertainments should be more generally characterized by moderation and intellectual enjoyments; rather than made occasions of ostentatious gaiety and excessive indulgence. An increase of properly conducted social in-

tercourse is one of the great wants of our city; especially when we consider the large number of young persons that make this their home. They must have amusement and recreation; but how important that their leisure hours should be made to minister to their moral and intellectual welfare, rather than to the formation and confirmation of evil and pernicious habits!

But what, I ask, is the case with our young men? Are they forming characters and habits that will qualify them to occupy the stations now filled by their fathers? Alas! are not many of them coming up under influences that are calculated to corrupt their morals, and to ruin their souls? There are traps and snares in our very midst, threatening their destruction, and which they should shun as the precursors of death. Profanity, intemperance, desecration of the Lord's day, gambling and licentious dissipation, are too common amongst us. Iniquity abounds, and the love of many waxeth cold. So that to thoughtful minds the moral and religious character of our city, in another generation, is a subject of most anxious and painful solicitude. It is a matter of far greater concern than the removal of all our financial difficulties, as perplexing and burdensome as they are; and I pray God that His good Providence may so favor our city that it may be exalted by the blessing of the upright, and not be overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.

I do not speak thus from any persuasion that our city is peculiarly lax in its morals, or deficient in its piety, among the cities of the West. Similar remarks would be appropriate in almost any community, with reference to the vi-

cious practices to which allusion has been made. I have yet to see the city or town, in the West or in the East, in the North or in the South, whose moral and religious condition does not call for solemn admonition and remonstrance from the pulpit; and the sad truth is, that, as a general rule, the pulpit is too unmindful of its duty in regard to the ordinary evils and vices of society. It is my earnest desire that, throughout this rising and promising and prosperous State, our own pulpits may ever be heard rebuking vice in all its varied forms, and giving forth a clear voice in favor of that high and strict morality which is the handmaid of true religion, and which is so promotive of the best interests of human society in all its grades and conditions.

> "The pulpit, in the sober use
> Of its legitimate peculiar powers,
> Must stand acknowledged, while the world shall stand,
> The most important and effectual guard,
> Support, and ornament of virtue's cause."

The remarks which I have offered in regard to our city are applicable to our State. Iowa is just taking its place among the completely organized and distinct communities that make up our glorious confederacy. With its new Constitution, it may be regarded as entering upon its more mature age in its political existence. With the controverted features of that instrument I have nothing to do; but as a citizen of the State, and as one who from my official position must feel a special interest in the prosperity of the same, I may properly say that the new era upon which our State has now entered affords a most fitting opportunity for the ministers of religion to call upon the people to enter

also upon a more exalted career of moral virtue. For a new State, our own is probably as highly favored as any other as to the general character of its population. Brought together from all parts of the country, and from the various nations of the old world, our people are yet, in general, as quiet and orderly as could be expected under the circumstances. The recent violence that has appeared in some portions of the State, by which the ordinary administrations of justice have been unfortunately forestalled and hindered, is no indication of the general spirit and conduct of our citizens; and was itself occasioned, though not justified, by a peculiar condition of things, unknown in the older sections of the country. Our cities, towns and villages are generally as free from confusion and violence as those of New England, and our citizens have none to molest them or make them afraid.

But, notwithstanding all our temporal and civil advantages, we need, as a State, a higher elevation of morals and of religion. God has given us, as its very name denotes, a beautiful heritage. We have a rich soil and a healthful climate, and everything that is necessary to make our State great and prosperous. Our broad prairies are fast coming under the culture of an industrious population, and the various departments of business are in successful operation. The existing depression, which we feel in common with the other portions of the country, and with foreign lands, is doubtless but a temporary check to our progress, and is, in itself, calculated to impress upon us a most salutary lesson. It should teach us to be less engrossed by mere secular and mercenary

pursuits, and more regardful of those things which tend to improve the mind and save the soul. On this day of Public Thanksgiving, it should be a leading desire of our entire people, while grateful to God for all His past and present mercies, to listen to His voice in the chastenings of His Providence, and to bow with submission under His fatherly correction. Our heavy embarrassments as a people, should incite us to increased diligence in laying up treasures which can never leave us nor forsake us. In the forcible language of the Bishop of Pennsylvania, "For years, our intense devotion to material pursuits and interests, our presumptuous self-confidence, our inflated system of credit, prompting to enterprises of the most delusive character, our stupendous combinations, tainted too often by fraud and deception, our prodigality and ostentation, our too general disregard of the solemn obligation of contracts, and our multiplying examples of violated faith—all have been combined to invite Divine retribution. The blow has now fallen with a suddenness and a force unparalelled in our history. It has involved, in its terrific course, the fortunes and subsistence of thousands of innocent and helpless persons, and there is presented throughout the land the spectacle of a people whose granaries and storehouses are filled, and on whom Providence has delighted to shower its best gifts, and who are yet reeling on the verge of universal bankruptcy. May God give us grace to recognize in all this a punishment provoked by our recklessness and guilt. May He enable us to learn wisdom for the future, and to seek for help, in our hours of sorrow and dark perplexity, at the fountain of His mercy."

This crushing dispensation has come upon our country at a time when it was most needed, and at a time when thoughtful and wise men were fearing and expecting its occurrence. As yet, the West may feel its power less than the East; but it is upon us, and we may yet experience its sad effects still more deeply. It becomes us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and to pray that our State, as well as our city, may be exalted by the blessing of the upright, and not be overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. Our resources, our climate, soil and enterprise will not avail us. We must have an increase of moral virtue, and of Christian principle. Corruption has ruined many a land as beautiful and as bright as ours. As has been eloquently said, "The skies of Italy are softer than our own, her breezes more salubrious, her lands are fertile, and Rome was once the home of giant men. But virtue held not the throne; and now the traveler, as he looks upon the wasted land, and walks among that wilderness of ruins, seeks a solitary spot to weep, and sadly commune with glories bright, but gone. Ah! it is public virtue that makes a nation great. Take ours away, and before our manhood shall be reached, the traveler will be called to weep over the early and hopeless grave of our glory. For thousands of years, nations have been trying the experiment of prosperity without God. They have always failed, and be assured we shall not be the first to succeed. The morality of the Bible is our rock. Let this go, and with it goes the ruined nation." Let us then see to it that we, as a sovereign State, contribute what we can to the prosperity and perpetuity of our institutions as a nation,

by shaping the elements of society by moral and religious principle; so that it may ever be true of us, in all ages and generations, that God "hath not dealt so with any nation."

In the shaping of these elements, we, as a Church, have an important part to perform. It is very obvious that the influence of the Protestant Episcopal Church in this State is destined to increase in full proportion to the increase of population. Indeed, there are indications of a still greater increase. The conservative character of our Church, its solemn and appropriate forms of devotion, its system of religious training, its primitive order, and its venerable history, all combine to commend it to the taste, the judgment, and the conscience; and there are not a few amongst us who feel the strength of its claims, who are not as yet connected with its communion, or its congregations. Our actual increase within the past four years,—the period of the existence of the Diocese since its distinct organization,—has been such as to fill us with thankfulness to God. No Diocese of our Church has ever made more rapid progress; though we are as yet small and weak, compared with several of the denominations by which we are surrounded.

My object in speaking of this increase of our Church is to show that our responsibility for the religious character of our State is increasing also. We who minister in holy things are awfully responsible for the tone of piety that characterizes our congregations, and we are all responsible together for the general influence which, as a Church, we exert in the community. A solemn responsibility rests upon others also; but we are bound to be as exemplary and devoted

as though the character of the State depended upon ourselves alone. We are happy to recognize among other bodies of Christians the leading truths and doctrines which we hold as "the faith once delivered to the saints," though we believe them to have departed from the primitive order of the Church. With regard to all such we would say, in Christian love and charity, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." "Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and we therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." We rejoice, and will rejoice, that the great salvation of the Gospel is proclaimed and embraced by others besides ourselves, and that they, as well as we, desire the glory of God and the welfare of immortal souls. We certainly differ from them on some points of no small importance; but they are still our brethren in Christ Jesus, and in our own respective spheres of action we should all labor in peace, harmony and good-will for the spiritual interests of the whole community. We can make no compromises as to our doctrinal or our ecclesiastical system; but we can and will rejoice in any holy influence that may be exerted, though large contributions thereto be made by those who follow not with us.

The spirit of charity and toleration is the spirit of the Gospel; so that while we firmly adhere to our own convictions of truth and duty, we should let our moderation be known unto all men, and believe that others may be as sincere and as honest as ourselves. It is very necessary to the peace and happiness of every community that such a spirit should prevail. Without it, there will be social exclusiveness, religious controversy, and domestic discord. With it, there will still be differences of opinion and belief, but there will be, at the same time, kindness, forbearance, and love. For purposes of His own, God has permitted the separation of Christians into numerous distinct organizations. Under such circumstances, it is the duty of all to promote unity of spirit, and to be supremely desirous to present to the world a consentient testimony to the efficacy of the Gospel in producing peace on earth and good will among men.

This unity of spirit has hitherto characterized the Christians of Iowa in a happy degree; and it should be our endeavor to perpetuate it to the latest generations. It is by no means incompatible with a diversity of doctrinal views and of ecclesiastical organizations. Let Christians adhere to these according to their conscientious convictions. Let each doctrinal and ecclesiastical system stand upon the basis of its own merits, and make its way to the hearts of men by the force of its own claims. But let there be, on the part of Christians of every name, a spirit of forbearance and brotherly love; and if there be any rivalry, let it be the noble rivalry of striving to excel each other in the amount of holy influence to be exerted upon a community whose dearest interests are identified with the prevalence of a sound morality and an evangelical piety.

So far as we are concerned, as a Diocese, let it be our united desire to make everything secondary and subservient to the extension in our midst of that kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.—

While devotedly attached to the distinctive principles of our own Church, let us "maintain and set forwards, as much as lieth in us, quietness, peace and love, among all Christian people." Let us ever evince a wise moderation towards our brethren who differ from us, and be ready and happy to recognize the spirit of Christ wherever we may discover it. True charity and spirituality are of more importance than any particular grade of mere external Churchmanship; and may we ever let our warm sympathies go forth towards all who bring forth the fruits of the Spirit in a close walk with God, though they be not connected with us in the bonds of ecclesiastical union. It should ever be true of a genuine Churchman, that

> "To sect or party his large soul
> Disdains to be confined;
> The good he loves of every name,
> And prays for all mankind."

Let us show by our conduct that a consistent love for our own Church has no necessary connection with narrow-minded bigotry, or ascetic exclusiveness; but that we entertain those enlarged and catholic views which pervade our standards of faith and devotion, and which have ever characterized the best men of our Church in her brightest and most prosperous days. In this way we shall not only be acting in accordance with the true spirit of our Church, but shall also be enabled to exert a happy influence upon the religious character of our fellow-citizens. A spirit of true evangelical piety, in connection with our ecclesiastical polity and our beautiful Liturgy, is a powerful instrument for the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom in the hearts and lives of men; and we have only to maintain such

a spirit, in order to be the means of incalculable benefit to the whole community, elevating its moral and religious tone, and thus contributing to its highest and most lasting prosperity.

I feel, my brethren, that I have failed to treat this subject with the faithfulness, the earnestness, and the ability which its importance demands. I have presented it from a sense of duty, and from a desire to promote the spiritual good of our city and State. It is impressed upon my mind that the moral and religious character and prospects of our people are in no little danger; and as a watchman upon the walls of Sion I raise a note of admonition and warning. I would that this admonition and warning might reach every professing Christian in this growing and thriving community. Were I addressing all our worshipping congregations, assembled together with one accord in one place, I would say to them in tones of earnest entreaty,—Christians of the present generation! be faithful to the trust that God has committed to you. Your children and your children's children will soon take your places amid the active scenes of life, while you are sleeping in the cold and silent grave. They call upon you to be mindful of their spiritual and eternal interests; to create here a moral atmosphere in which they can live without contamination; to set before them an example which they may safely follow; to point them to a brighter world, and to lead the way. The coming generations of citizens, in all the ages of the future, demand of you that you transmit to them a goodly heritage; that you hand down to them, untarnished and unimpaired, the precious boon that has come to you from a

departing generation; and that, whatever else you fail to secure to them, you fail not to secure a religious influence that shall guide them into the way of peace, and lead them on to glory, honor and immortality. God himself calls upon you, in the voice of His Providence, and in the pages of His word, to provide for the spiritual wants of those who are to come after you; and to remember that it is by the blessing of the upright that the city is exalted, while it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked. O Christians of the present generation! fear and tremble under a sense of your responsibilities, and so act your part that your posterity may rise up and call you blessed; and that you yourselves may at last be welcomed to the golden streets and the many mansions of that city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God!

Most gracious God, by whose knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew; we yield thee unfeigned thanks and praise, as for all thy mercies, so especially for the returns of seed-time and harvest, and for crowning the year with thy goodness, in the increase of the ground, and the gathering in of the fruits thereof. And we beseech thee, give us a just sense of this great mercy; such as may appear in our lives, by an humble, holy, and obedient walking before thee all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost, be all glory and honor, world without end. *Amen.*

O most Merciful Father, who hast blessed the labours of the husbandman in the returns of the fruits of the earth; we give thee humble and hearty thanks for this thy bounty; beseeching thee to continue thy loving-kindness to us; that our land may still yield her increase, to thy glory and our comfort; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

END OF
TITLE